



News Release

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For Release: July 13, 2011

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Fish and Wildlife Service Evaluates Landmark Wind Energy Corridor from Canada to Gulf of Mexico

-Public Comment Sought-

As part of Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar's "Smart from the Start" initiative to accelerate the responsible development of wind energy projects across the nation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has begun to evaluate the environmental impacts of wind energy development across a 200-mile wide corridor stretching from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico on the Texas coast. This innovative approach to wind energy development, the first of this scope, will apply to non-federal lands.

"Wind energy is crucial to our nation's future economic and environmental security. We will do our part to facilitate development of wind energy resources, while ensuring that they are sited and designed in ways that minimize and avoid negative impacts to fish and wildlife," said Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe. "This EIS process gives us an opportunity to evaluate impacts to dozens of imperiled species at a landscape level to ensure that wind energy development occurs in the right places in the right way."

In response to a request from a group of wind energy development companies, the Service will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) evaluating the companies' application for an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The potential ITP could include species protected by the ESA and ESA candidate species within portions of nine states (Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas) and cover regional-level construction, operation, and maintenance associated with multiple commercial wind energy facilities.

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife and plants. This landmark conservation law has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species across the nation and promoted the recovery of many others. The Service's priority is to make implementation of the ESA less complex, less contentious, and more effective.

"It is the industry's expectation that development of the Great Plains Wind Energy HCP will streamline the ESA permitting process, allowing for the compatible goals of effective wildlife conservation and robust wind energy development throughout the region, all while easing the Service's administrative burden. This is a perfect example of how industry, the Service, states and other stakeholders can work collaboratively to develop an overall conservation strategy that is in the best interest of the affected species," said John Anderson, AWEA's Director of Siting Policy.

An ITP is a permit issued under Section 10 of the ESA to private, non-federal entities undertaking otherwise lawful projects that might result in the take of an endangered or threatened species. "Take" is defined by the ESA as harassment, harm, pursuit, hunting, shooting, wounding, killing, trapping, capture, or collection of any threatened or endangered species.

To obtain an ITP, an applicant must submit a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) containing measures which would minimize incidental take to any species protected by the ESA, including avoidance of incidental take, and mitigate the effects of any incidental take to the maximum extent practicable; and ensure that the taking is incidental to, and not the purpose of, an otherwise lawful activity. If the Service determines that an applicant has satisfied all permitting criteria and other statutory requirements, the ITP is issued.

The planning area includes a 200-mile wide corridor determined by defining the center line of the whooping crane migration path corridor (100 miles on either side of the center line). This corridor encompasses parts of North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. In addition, the planning area also includes the current range and a large part of the historic range of the lesser prairie-chicken, which extends the permit area beyond the 200-mile-wide whooping crane migration corridor to include parts of Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas.

The Service is providing this notice in order to (1) describe the proposed action; (2) advise other federal and state agencies, potentially affected tribal interests, and the public of the agency's intent to

prepare an EIS; (3) announce the initiation of a 90-day public scoping period; and (4) obtain suggestions and information on the scope of issues and possible alternatives to be included in the EIS.

This notice will publish in the *Federal Register* on July 14, 2011. Comments must be received within 90 days, on or before October 12, 2011. For information on how and where to submit comments, visit the Service's web site at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/> to download a copy of the notice.

The Service will hold public meetings in the following cities between August 2011 and September 2011: Glendive, MT; Bismarck, ND; Pierre, SD; Kearney, NE; Great Bend, KS; Woodward, OK; Amarillo, TX; Austin, TX; Corpus Christi, TX; Clovis, NM; and Pueblo, CO.

Specific dates and times of public meetings can be obtained by calling the Service's toll-free information hotline for the Environmental Impact Statement on the Great Plains Wind Energy Habitat Conservation Plan at 1-800-815-8927. The dates and locations will also be available on the Service's web site at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/> and noticed in local newspapers at least 14 days prior to the meeting dates. Persons needing reasonable accommodations in order to attend and participate in the public meetings should contact Laila Lienesch at 505-248-6494 or laila_lienesch@fws.gov, no later than one week before the public meeting.

Species that will be evaluated for inclusion under the permit include the endangered whooping crane (*Grus americana*), endangered interior least tern (*Sterna antillarum athalassos*), endangered piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*), and lesser prairie-chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*), a candidate species. The final list of covered species may include all these species, a subset of them, and/or additional species, based on the outcome of this planning process.

The ITP is voluntarily being sought by a group of wind energy industry companies formed in 2009: the Wind Energy Whooping Crane Action Group (WEWAG). Member companies include Acciona North America; Allete; Alternity; BP Wind Energy; Clipper Wind Energy; CPV Renewable Energy Company, LLC; EnXco; Duke Energy Renewables; EDPR (Horizon Wind Energy); Element Power; Iberdrola Renewables; Infinity; MAP Royalty; NextEra Energy Resources; Own Energy; Renewable Energy Systems Americas; Terra-Gen; Trade Wind Energy; and Wind Capital Group. Additional companies may become involved as the planning process proceeds.

America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. The Service is working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species program, go to <http://www.fws.gov/Endangered>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

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